

## **Criminological Study of General Aspects of the Preventive Influence of the theory of Routine Activity on Criminal Behavior**

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### **Abstract**

Under routine activities, we can highlight all the specifics that can be linked to the specific way of life of a certain social group in a certain area that developed during the historical development of that society. Such a way of life led to excessive liberalization regarding the freedom of behavior of individuals, which was used for a series of actions and activities that have a delinquent sign. Thus, individuals become perpetrators of some of the criminal acts. The old norms of behavior were rejected, and modern trends were accepted, in which the rules apply primarily: "the end justifies the means". This implies the fact that it is important to reach a certain goal, but the way in which that goal was reached or the means used are not important at all, i.e. it is irrelevant whether it is a permitted or illegal way and with the use of permitted or illegal means. In the light of contemporary social events, even though in one historical period the development of criminology as a science was slowed down, and even stopped. It certainly left a mark on the development of the theory of routine activities and the problems it deals with, i.e. contemporary aspects of society that have significance for the overall events that fall within the domain of studying criminology and the theory of routine activities from the aspect of criminal behavior and its prevention.

**Keywords:** Criminology, criminal behavior, routine activity theory, general principles of routine activity theory, prevention.

### **Introduction**

In the last quarter of the 20th century in the United States of America, a new criminology theory was born that was built on the positivist heritage of earlier theories. It was created as a result of an analysis of the state of crime and its growth and an attempt to respond to the causes of such growth, regardless of the fact that society has invested considerable effort in reducing it, primarily social

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problems. Thus, it can be said that this theory, like a number of other criminological theories, deals with issues of criminal behavior, and strives with its scientific contributions to give a significant share in the overall fight against crime and social opposition to this negative and retrograde phenomenon. The theory has extremely developed prevention programs in order for society to oppose and implement a social policy of opposition to criminality and other forms of deviant behavior as effectively as possible.

By the way, crime prevention includes various activities undertaken by various subjects, starting from state authorities through non-governmental organizations, various associations, media and others. These activities include the application of various measures and activities in the field of preventive activities against criminal behavior. All these activities have a unique goal, and they relate to the reduction of various activities in the field of offenses related to drugs, terrorism, money laundering, cybercrime, as well as violent, property and other forms of criminal behavior.

The theory primarily works to reduce the possibility that a certain person commits a criminal offense and for this it provides the theoretical foundations for the prevention and fight against criminal activity. With that, she makes her contribution in the social effort to oppose this retrograde and backwards phenomenon, in the prevention of which all segments of the social community would be involved. Given that the main task is to create prerequisites for reducing criminal behavior, the theory has a wide application through preventive activities in various areas, and thus found its foothold in many areas of social life.

A wide variety of studies have attempted to validate routine activity theory and these studies provide a strong foundation for the current research. Some have employed macro-level data to approximate the construct of routine activities (Cohen 1981; Messner and Blau 1987; Miethe et al. 1991). Others have relied on survey data collected from individuals (Miethe et al. 1987; Osgood et al. 1996), and still others have combined micro- and macro-level variables to represent routine activities within a social structure (Cohen et al. 1981; Kennedy and Forde 1990; Miethe and McDowall 1993; Rountree and Land 1996; Sampson and Lauritsen 1990; Sampson and Wooldredge 1987). As mentioned earlier, these studies have found inconsistent support for the theory. The studies suffer from three main shortcomings: (1) failure to consider the spatio-temporal structure of routine activities, (2) measurement issues, and (3) the inability to accommodate dynamic, individual-level interactions. (Groff, 2007)

## **Methodology**

The significance of this paper lies in the importance of the problem it deals with. (Maloku et al. 2023). The research in this paper has the characteristics of scientific theoretical research, which is necessarily qualitative in nature (Qerimi et al, 2023). Considering that it is a theoretical scientific research that will focus on the study of scientific and other literature, the work will primarily be based on the application of the document content analysis method, as the most expedient scientific method that gives the best results for this type of research. This method, for the purposes of this paper, uses theoretical sources of data (books, articles, etc.) whose subject of study was the theory of routine activity.

Of course, the need to use other general scientific methods, as well as the entire range of analytical-synthetic methods and methods of data collection, such as the biographical method, with the purpose of collecting and presenting the most relevant knowledge and data that most directly affect the subject of this work - general aspects of the preventive influence of the theory of routine activity on criminal behavior.

## **Results and discussion**

The theory of routine activity belongs to newer sociological theories based on positivist heritage (Ignjatović, 2005). It was created as a result of trying to figure out the answer to the increase in crime in the United States of America during the 20th century. It is especially significant to reveal this, bearing in mind the fact that criminality was on the rise regardless of the involvement of all resources invested in its prevention and suppression as a negative social phenomenon.

When trying to explain criminality, some factors come to the fore that are intertwined in time and space, but three most important elements stand out in particular, namely: „(1) motivated offenders, (2) suitable targets, and (3) the absence of capable guardians against a violation.“ (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Authors Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson are considered the founders of this theory and believe that there is a specific interdependence that occurs between victims and perpetrators of a criminal act (offender). Thus, there are many factors that influence the crime rate, which are reflected in the numerous characteristics of routine activities, both of the offender and the victim, such as a specific way of life and acquired habits, as well as various sociological characteristics that are most obviously manifested through various processes of industrialization, inadequately protected targets etc. (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

The theory of routine activity and its basic principles are later associated by some authors with the term "criminal lifestyle", which is associated with the

name of the American psychologist Glen D. Walters. By the way, the theory of lifestyle was introduced into the criminological and victimological literature by Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo (1978), who defined lifestyles as "patterned, regular, repetitive, prevalent or routine activities." (Doležal, 2017).

The author Milić states that the theory of routine activity is the founder of environmental criminology, which began in the "seventies of the last century", that is, it studied the behavior patterns of the perpetrator and the victim in relation to the geospace (environment) where the crime is committed (Milić, 2014).

The basic value and essence of this theory is reflected in the fact that it bases its teaching on the involvement of various social subjects in the prevention of criminal behavior, which was a significant departure from the previously accepted position that relied on the suppression of crime through the police and other specialized bodies in charge of fighting crime behavior.

#### **A. Theory of Routine Activities**

The theory of routine activities can be classified into those theories where the situational approach to crime prevention is its basis, and it is very similar to the theory of rational choice, so some authors believe that it belongs to the theory of rational choice. When choosing a target, place, time, as well as other elements related to the commission of a criminal act, the perpetrator is guided and guided by the standard routine activity of the victim as a key element when choosing his convenience for the victim.

##### *i.. Theoretical framework of the theory of routine activities*

Routine activity theory was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson. It can also be considered a part of the theory that has situational elements in its basis. From this, it can be concluded that the victim will be attacked somewhere in a lonely place (park, playground, the street on the outskirts of the city, etc.), an unlit place than he will be attacked in a much safer place (eg his apartment). These two authors point out that after the Second World War, the economies of the countries of Western Europe flourished, and thus the well-being in those countries. However, despite such development and prosperity of the society, criminality increased significantly, and criminality was also flourishing. As a reason for this, they see an increased number of opportunities for criminal behavior and opportunities for it. There are indications that social causes such as poverty and unemployment do not play a significant role in increasing the crime rate. Felson takes into account the social-psychological aspect and he believes that the family has the most immediate influence on the individual to deter him from criminal behavior. Apart from the family, the immediate social environment plays a very important role in the suppression of crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Cohen

and Felson point out that many conventional theories of crime have difficulty explaining the changes in the rise in crime rates after World War II (Ignjatović, 2009).

To commit a crime, it is necessary is that at the same time in a certain place (which is not under the supervision of the protector) find a motivated perpetrator and a suitable target. These three elements constitute the so-called triangle of criminal offense analysis (motivated perpetrator, attractive target and convenient place). „The theory of routine activities views crime as a direct product of assembly social conditions, whereby any disturbance of the "balance" between the three key elements of the criminal offense can affect the change in the crime rate, and therefore, this theory can play a significant role in its prediction and prevention.“ (Milić, 2014).

In the beginning, it had primarily its emphasis on property crimes. A suitable target in that case can be a person or an object, while the guard, in principle, is not a policeman or a member of a security agency, but the owner, a family member, or someone close to the owner of the property. It is easier for a delinquent to choose a target that does not have its guardian nearby.

This theory uniquely seeks to explain the risks for victimization among individuals, as well as the role of certain environments and locations on criminal events and the frequency of those events in those locations. As stated by Mirza Buljubasic, "Cohen and Felson (1979) developed a structural theory which they called the theory of routine activities. The theory explains how various social changes together affect crime rates. Theorists argued that crime occurs when the following three elements exist at the same time in the same place: the presence of motivated criminals, the lack of a capable guard, and the availability of suitable targets." (Buljubasić, 2021). The essence of the theory is based on the thesis that certain conditions must be met for delinquent behavior to occur, namely (Ignjatović, 2005):

- a) motivation of potential representatives,
- b) suitable targets for attack i
- c) the absence of an effective defense mechanism against attacks, i.e. the absence of a capable guard.

When it comes to a motivated criminal, it can be stated that some theories deal with the study of the social environment in which delinquents live and come to the conclusion that they make their decisions based on a rational choice of the target's convenience. Some other theories study the very space in which delinquents live. This theory advocates the point of view that the crime rate is mostly proportional to the number of motivated criminals in the community such as: unemployed, drug addicts, alcoholics, teenagers, etc. Motivation can be

reduced when potential offenders can legitimately pursue their goals. Others believe that routine activities are influenced through socialization and the moral standards set for individuals (Clark & Felson, 1993). Social connection and control has a strong influence to deter an individual from committing a delinquent act and serves as a buffer zone to separate the criminal and deter him from criminal activity.

Regarding the convenience of the target and the role of the victim in criminal behavior, it should be emphasized that the role of the victim was suppressed for a long time, more precisely until the first half of the 20th century. Only then does a significant development of victimology occur as a science that studies the role of the victim in criminal activities. Thus, since 1966, in the USA - the Commission of the President of the United States for Criminal Law and the Administration of the Judiciary - began with the systematic monitoring and collection of victims of all types of crimes, so in 1975 "40.5 million victimizations were determined." (Ramljak & Simović, 2006). Further, in Ottawa (Canada) from 09.-13. In September 1984, a preparatory meeting for the Seventh UN Congress was held with far-reaching positive developments, where a draft Declaration was adopted, which will be adopted a year later at the aforementioned congress in Milan. Namely, the subject of the congress on crime prevention is dedicated to the broad field of "Victims of Crime". All types of crime victims are comprehensively covered..." (Ramljak & Simović, 2006).

When these three elements are fulfilled, a situation is reached where the probability of a criminal act occurring is significantly increased. In order to reduce criminal activity, the theory of routine activity offers solutions in terms of action on the already mentioned three categories as follows:

- 1) to reduce the motivation of criminals in terms of reducing the need to commit a criminal act,
- 2) undertaking measures and actions in the field of reducing the availability and attractiveness of the target as a potential victim of criminal activity,
- 3) increase the guard's ability to monitor and protect a potential target.

It is important to note that these three elements are in a divergent relationship, i.e. by proactively acting on one of these factors, the effectiveness and efficiency of the other two factors is increased. These three conditions come together in both time and space. They have a convergent relationship, which means that the presence of one element has an affirmative effect on the other two elements, but it also works in the opposite direction (Cohen, & Felson, 2010). This can be put into words as follows: in order for a crime to occur, the would-be perpetrator must find a suitable target whose guard is absent. A possible perpetrator increases his motivation for criminal behavior if the target is more

suitable or if we have a situation where the absence of a guard is obvious. The motivation of the offender is very important, so if the offender is extremely motivated, he will probably decide to commit the offense, although Cohen and Felson attach special importance to the third "factor, indicating that they are not referring only to (state and private) specialized protection services, but to a multitude of procedures by which citizens protect their and other people's property on a daily basis" (Ignjatović, 2005: 196). Potential perpetrators are individuals who are capable of committing a criminal act. The essence of this theory is that a crime is committed by someone who has the opportunity to do so, and the focus is on certain events and on the perpetrator of the criminal act.

The suitability of the target can be crucial for its execution, as well as the situation presented to the criminal. Likewise, it is very important that this theory considers the fact that a potential victim of criminal behavior should in any case take measures and actions to reduce to the smallest possible extent the possibility of a criminal act or attack of any other kind being committed against them.

Therefore, the commission of a criminal offense is based on the assumptions that potential perpetrators, acting based on their routine activities, visit potential targets in their area daily. "Criminal opportunities and victims are influenced by routine activities. Encountering a challenging opportunity or victim can lead to a short-term increase in antisocial potential." (Buljubašić, 2021). Thus, the perpetrator will always rather choose a house as a potential target where no one lives, whether the absence is only during the day or the absence for a long period, than a house where its household members stay every day. It is important to mention the observations of criminologists who link two factors: the behavior of the offender and the behavior of the victim, which intertwine and intertwine, as well as other phenomena that can be ignored at first glance. These phenomena can be the behavior of the victim and their way of life, industrialization, the presence of "interesting" objects, etc.

*ii. Substantial empirical evidence for routine activity theory*

Today, a studious, serious, and scientifically valid approach and a thorough analysis of the development of a criminal act are of exceptional importance. With this, it is possible to take a comprehensive look at all the elements that have a part, e.g. in the case of criminal murder, or the answer will be that it is an exemplary, exceptional case. This is sometimes of crucial influence to prevent crime from happening at all. Namely, with detailed and precise insight, based on empirical findings, into the essence of the crime and all the determinants that shape it, the victim of the crime has the opportunity to paralyze all

incriminating factors and stop the commission of the crime." (Ramljak & Simović, 2006).

From the foundation of the theory of routine activity until today, many scientists have conducted a significant amount of research in order to get an answer as to which elements and what kind of lifestyle is conducive to increased victimization of a potential victim. Through these studies, five factors that increase the risk have been identified, namely: demographics, social activities, alcohol and drugs, economic status and the structure of the social community. In addition to these factors, identifying when, where and under what circumstances and conditions crime could occur can make it easier for criminologists and society to see and identify the key factors that favor the emergence and development of crime. This makes the fight against such socially backward behavior easier.

The theory of routine activity has its value in the epistemological and instrumental sense, and takes into account sociological, psychological and situational variables. This is concluded from the premise that motivation is primarily a psychological aspect, while other factors are sociological. When it comes to situational moments, it can be concluded that they indicate the victim's vulnerability and the absence of a capable guardian.

Theorists Felson and Cohen believe that people who live alone are more likely to be attacked and have a higher risk of victimization in terms of personal and property crimes. It is a generally accepted point of view that the crime rate has increased in recent years, even though living conditions have not worsened. The US Census Bureau reported that the number of blacks who completed high school rose significantly from 43% in 1960 to 61% in 1968, while the unemployment rate dropped significantly between 1959 and 1967. This influenced the fact that the income of blacks in the cities increased by 61%. In the same period, the number of people living below the legally defined poverty line in cities decreased from 11,300,000 to 8,300,000. Regardless of the continuation of these trends in the USA, the FBI report (1975), it is indicated that between 1960 and 1970 the rate of robbery increased by 263%, aggravated assault by 174%, and murder and rape by 188% (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

These changes are claimed to be influenced by changes in routine activities during everyday life. A motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians contribute to an increase in crime rates. The absence of any of those three elements greatly increases the risk of committing criminal acts more frequently. Every violation of norms and every criminal behavior implies a perpetrator who has the motivation, inclination, and ability to perform those actions. If any of these three elements are missing, then it will be a significant condition for no criminal activity to occur.



When analyzing these factors, one should take into account the progress of techniques and technology that favor the easier achievement of goals by persons inclined to commit criminal acts. On the other hand, technical possibilities and technical progress directed in a positive direction and for legitimate purposes (alarms, video surveillance, etc.) can prevent the criminal from realizing his criminal intent and help people protect themselves, their property, and other persons. and their property. For a possible criminal attack, it largely depends on the fact whether the person or his property is desirable for the criminal, whether it is physically visible and easily accessible, whether access to the target is difficult, whether the target is physically capable of resisting and repelling the attack from himself, whether the target or trained guard is armed or not, etc. All these are important facts in order to fulfill the conditions for a criminal act by motivated criminals.

Namely, during life, each individual acquires routine activities in the appropriate space, such as going to school, traveling to work, playing sports and recreation, going shopping, hanging out with friends, etc. It is a "hodogram of activities" that a person exercises in that space. The name of such a space is "conscious spaces" and the perpetrator often does not choose the place of execution of the criminal offense by chance, but rather does it in a location that he knows well, such as the area where the perpetrator lives, goes to school, works or in any other way acts in that area. space. Each perpetrator has his own routine activities that he carries out in the area where he moves and acts, and this affects when making a decision on the place of execution of the criminal act. Thus, the delinquent forms an image within his cognitive maps (Clark & Felson, 1993). The results of the study show that more than 50% of property crimes and crimes with an element of violence are committed within 2 km of the perpetrator's place of residence. The situation is similar when it comes to sexual offenses, which mostly occur within 3.2 km of the perpetrator's place of residence.

Haltfreter, Reisig, and Pratt conducted research to demonstrate that decreased self-control will produce greater victimization of the victim. Research results have shown that a low level of self-control increases the risk of victimization (Pratt, Holtfreter & Reisig, 2012).

Hawdon states in his research that Hirschi found that routine activity was the best predictor of serious crime. Individuals have certain routine patterns that have a low level of social control and therefore have a higher degree of criminal behavior (Hawdon, 1999).

## **B. The Importance of Preventive Activities in the Theory of Routine Activities**

As for the preventive practice, it can be concluded that it had a great influence on the preventive processes as a whole. This contribution is reflected in the observation of criminal activities from two special aspects. First, the overall set of social relations reflects the tendency of overall social events, including criminal behavior. The second aspect is reflected in the fact of observing the criminal act as a whole in its full capacity and not analyzing its segments, which in the final analysis, the separation of individual segments of the delinquent act has a bad conclusion, and by avoiding this analysis, the advantage of the theory is compared to other theories.

This theory also recommends a series of preventive measures and actions that could be summarized in several items and recommendations. First of all, measures that will make it much more difficult for the perpetrator to access his goal, that is the target of the attack. These measures can be diverse, and they can refer to the macro and micro-locations where the potential target is located. Then, there are measures related to architectural solutions in and around the target, such as the construction of walls around the target, the material from which it was built if it is a building, well-secured roof, doors and windows, anti-burglary systems, etc. (Clark & Felson, 1993). Nowadays, when technology has advanced, video surveillance plays an important role, both external and internal. Then, keeping animals specially trained to guard property, e.g. dogs, as well as several other measures that can be taken to make it difficult for the perpetrator to have access to the execution of his criminal intent, also makes the execution of the crime more difficult.

Another type of measure are measures that will reduce the possible profit of the perpetrator after committing the crime. "A person will commit a criminal offense in a certain situation depending on social factors ... and cognitive processes that include subjective benefit..." (Buljubašić, 2021). This primarily refers to money, jewelry, gold, technical goods, securities, valuables and other valuables that can be easily and effectively cashed in after the crime has been committed. Very often, before deciding to "take action", the perpetrators spend a long time monitoring and gathering information about the "booty and benefits" they will achieve by committing the crime. Based on the collected information, they make their assessment about the usefulness and profitability of taking action. If they receive information that the owner, a potential target, does not carry a lot of money with him and does not keep it in the house/apartment but in the bank, it will be much more difficult for the potential perpetrator to decide to attack or break into the house/apartment if he will not have financial benefits.

The next thing that can be taken are measures and actions that will increase the likelihood that the perpetrator will be caught in that criminal act, because "encountering a challenging opportunity or victim can lead to a short-term increase in antisocial potential." (Buljubasic, 2021). In these activities, we can primarily mention the presence of police or security guards in and around the place of possible criminal offense, as well as other persons, such as employees, students, passers-by, etc. Likewise, a very important role is played by the natural transparency and visibility of an object that is a potential target.

We conclude that the prevention of crime in modern times requires the need to view criminal persons only as one segment of the overall criminal activity. In this context, it can be pointed out that potential victims should take certain actions themselves to prevent an attack on themselves or their property. This can be seen through the following examples: avoid dark streets when moving, avoid moving late at night, lock doors, close windows, install alarms, etc. The targets of crime are primarily determined by the physical environment (city and public transport, lighting, organized urban and suburban areas, etc.), as well as the routine activities of each individual. Routine activities can include lifestyle, regular trips during the weekend, shopping trips, the way of leaving and returning from work, the path one moves, some specific habits, use of free time, etc. All these factors (motivation, routine activities, and lifestyle) are conditioned by a large number of socioeconomic factors: age, gender, place of residence, etc. (Clark & Felson, 1993). All this can increase the degree of criminal attack on a potential target. In terms of the target, it refers to its attractiveness, material value, physical visibility, and accessibility. The absence of any one of the three basic elements preferred by the routine activity theory can prevent the commission of a crime.

### **C. A Critical review of the Theory of Routine Activity**

The theory of routine activity has a focus of its action on both the micro and the macro level. This theory is quite controversial among sociologists who take the social cause of criminality as a basis. It "can have a significant contribution to the construction of a rational and efficient model of preventive action that would be based on the influence of all social subjects instead of the previous reliance almost exclusively on the action of the police and specialized bodies of formal social control" (Ignjatović, 2005).

What can be singled out as shortcomings of this theory are some of the following facts and indicators.

The social position of a certain person and his material power significantly affect the possibility of keeping his property. More precisely, the question is how

much people have to invest to install technical means to protect themselves and their property, because this requires significant financial allocations. The time in which we live today does not favor most people in this regard, because it requires considerable material costs that the majority of the population cannot afford (Cohen & Felson, 2010).

If protective measures are taken, this leads to the relocation of criminality to less protected and guarded areas, so that the perpetrators of those criminal acts are more difficult to detect. Often, criminals resort to various ways to avoid being caught in their illegal activities, and this is reflected in the execution of criminal acts in a different time period compared to the time that was usual for the execution of criminal acts. Then, the commission of criminal offenses in a different way, that is, with a different method, orientation to a different goal than the "usual" goal, commission of a criminal offense in another place and some other criminal offense in a functional sense. Not infrequently, criminals agree to change who commits which crime in order to make it harder to detect them according to the "modus operandi" system.

This theory also has shortcomings in terms of ethics, because it limits human rights and freedoms, especially video surveillance, and calls into question trust between people. This undeniably causes the weakening of social ties and alienation from the community.

### **Conclusion**

We emphasize that the focus of the research and study of the theory of routine activities are the essential segments of the criminal manifestation (perpetrator, victim and situation). Those segments cannot be observed separately and cannot be studied as separate entities, but each study must be permeated and interwoven with all the elements together. Only in such a way can one get the overall picture regarding criminal behavior, because any such behavior depends on the readiness and ability of the individual to commit a criminal act, that is, his motivation, then, it depends on the attractiveness of the target and finally on the absence of its protection. It is precisely for this reason that the theory of routine activity works on a good integration of all these factors. It focuses attention on the circumstances in which the criminal act takes place, and with a motivated perpetrator and the absence of social control, without neglecting the place and time, the nature of criminal behavior in a wider area is clarified. It is considered that the life of potential perpetrators of criminal acts in a certain geographical area equally affects the patterns of their behavior, both legal and criminal. Patterns of both behaviors are intertwined, networked, and occur alternately one after the other.

The theory of routine activities left a distinct mark in criminological sciences and contributed to the development of that science with its proposals and suggestions. The essence of the theory is reflected in the response to three elements (a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guard), so the theory is reduced to three basic dimensions to reduce criminal behavior, namely:

- a) reduction of motivation among criminals,
- b) carrying out activities that make the target less attractive i
- c) increasing the ability of guards to monitor a potential target.

Therefore, to reduce criminal behavior and undertake preventive activities, different aspects are implemented in different forms. One of those activities is the implementation of the theory of routine activity in its scientific and social significance. Her contribution is extremely significant in preventing and combating crime of all forms and types. Its application should lead to positive results for the social defense system against all types of crime.

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